Special Article

Religion and Education

By **S. M. YUSUF**

AS we have already pointed out, the proposition advanced by Prof. Jha is but an attempt to supplant religion by his own political views or rather to turn his political beliefs into religion and then to make education a mere instrument for foisting it one all and sundry. There is nothing strange in it; it is only another result of a tendency to run away from realities and to pursue the mirage of wild and impracticable ideals. This lack of honest realism is exhibited in numerous ways but the most conspicuous example of it, perhaps, is the futile effort to create a new artificial *lingua franca* for India which has only resulted in giving rise to disunity where unity already existed.

It will be realised, and Prof. Jha makes no secret of it, that his entire outlook is dominated by a desire to achieve a common nationalism for all the different peoples of this vast sub-continent. Common nationalism, however, demands certain prerequisites which must, of necessity, precede it in a natural way and not follow it in an artificial manner. In order to be real, it must of itself grow out of a number of historical, political, cultural and, of course, religious factors; it cannot be imposed just because a few intellectuals take fancy to it. The very fact that attempts are being made to create those prerequisites is an admission that they do not yet exist and the utter failure, rather, the adverse effect, of these attempts is a proof positive that the very nature and the climate of a sub-continent do not suit a plant which can only thrive in a little island or small countries. Has not Britain failed to absorb Ireland into a common nationalism?

Wrong Approach

The lot of the Indian nationalist is miserable indeed. At every step he encounters stark realities which militate against the ideal that he has so fondly and slavishly borrowed in *toto* from the west. In his zeal he tries to hide the differences under attractive superstructures which, however, collapse even before they are complete, just because they rest on sands. This is an entirely and radically wrong approach.

The desire to remove the present ill-will between the different peoples of India is, no doubt, laudable, but the crux of the problem is how to do it? Would it not be more logical to have a fair estimate of the realities, to acknowledge boldly what is irrenconcilable and then to proceed to evolve an indigenous solution ensuring perfect freedom for all? Does it not offer a better prospect to allow the various elements to live happy and contented under many mansions, at the same time maintaining good neighbourly relations with each other?

Thus, we see that the political objective behind the so-called religious education, advocated by Prof. Jha, is exactly the same as envisaged by the champions of secular education. Both the schemes originated from a desire to circumvent the religious differences and a vain hope to pave the way for winning over the allegiance of the youth in favour of nationalism. As in the political so in the educational sphere, it is a sheer folly to seek to mould facts according to one's preconceived ideas rather than evolving one's ideal according to the realities of the situation. To approach the educational problem from the standpoint of a political ideal, which is itself a subject of controversy, is not only unjust but fraught with dangerous consequences.

Islamic Ideal

Prof. Jha has, by implication, admitted that if a Muslim and a Hindu were taught the religion of Islam and Hinduism as they are, and not only the truths or moral precepts which may be common to them, then denominational institutions become a necessity rather than an anachronism. We have now only to see what the Islamic ideal of education is.

Islam has only laid down one broad basic principle which must be fully ensured in any system of education. Once that fundamental principle is ensured there is perfect freedom to formulate the details according to the necessities of time and clime. Islam is not concerned at all whether the educational system should have an academic or a vocational bias; all that it insists on is that it should have a definitely and essentially Islamic bias. It is here that we see that purely secular education which is asserted to be harmless constitutes the greatest harm to the Islamic ideal. To eschew religion from the educational system is only to destroy and to efface it and then of course the ground is cleared for the implanting of any 'ism' which may be indirectly dumped on the empty and ignorant minds of the youth.

Motive Force

No doubt, Islam also needs spinners, scientists and technicians but only those who are true Muslims too. A scientist and a technician who is not fired with a desire to devote all his talents and skill to the service of Islam is no better an asset than a learned doctor of Muslim theology whose only mission is to discredit Islam and to bring it into disrepute. Knowledge and skill, of whatever kind they be, must only have a secondary place; the primary concern should be the inculcation of a love of Islam as the motive force of all activity.

If we only look at the development of Muslim arts and sciences we will find that the impetus to all academic, scientific and literary activity was provided only by a desire to vindicate Islam and to add to its glory. Thus the syllabus of Islamic institutions continued to expand and enlarge throughout the centuries so as to include the latest and the most up-to-date subjects, no matter whether they originated in Greece, Persia or any other country, but the nucleus of the whole system always remained the same, *i.e.*, the Quran and the Islamic teachings. Philosophy, Astronomy, Alchemy, etc., were all received and cultivated with an open mind but were all ultimately trimmed and harnessed to the service of Islam. This was not the result of prejudice or fanaticism, rather, it was the strength of conviction and intelligent appreciation of Islam that helped the Muslims to hold their own in the face of all impact of foreign ideas.

It will be seen that the principle enunciated above necessitates that no system of education can ever be acceptable to Muslims unless it includes a basic general course of Islamic studies. It must also be realised that the advocates of the fundamental truth of all religions labour under a serious misapprehension as to the implications of the word religion itself. At least, as far as Islam is concerned, religion does not signify merely a few commandments or a number of Do's and Don't's. Islam is a perfect code of life; hence it does not admit of any extraction or synthesis with any other religion. The *Quran* can never be replaced by Prof. Bhagwan Das's *Essential Unity of all Religions* for any Muslim youth. Further, as Islam covers all aspects of life, its education cannot be relegated to home corners as contemplated in the Wardha scheme. If a Muslim youth is to be brought up in the true Islamic spirit, a separate denominational institution is a necessity.

No New Problem

Lest it be said that the above observations are only characteristic of the present-day separatist tendency of the Indian Muslims, we need only add that the problem is not a new one. It was so far back as 1903 that Mr. (now Sir Akbar) Hydari's advocacy of common institutions and his opposition to the establishment of the Muslim University made Maulana Mohammad Ali, Nawab Muhsinul Mulk and other leading Muslims spring on their feet till, in the words of Maulana Mohammad Ali himself, Sir Akbar had to change his ideas and to accept the trusteeship of the M. A. O. College and the membership of the Muslim University Court. Maulana Mohammad Ali's vehement denunciation of the idea of common institutions at the

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